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THE "SPANISH TRAGEDY" AND "HAMLET."

The attribution of the lost play of "Hamlet" to Thomas Kyd lends additional interest to the relations between Kyd and Shakespeare. Resemblances of many kinds are noticeable among the works of the two writers. Such a coincidence as the following can hardly be accidental:

I had not thought that Alexandro's heart
Had been envenomed with such extreme hate:
But now I see that words have several works
And there's no credit in the countenance.

Sp. Tr. 3—1.

and the words of Duncan:

. There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face.

It is, however, not in such verbal similarities that we find a relation between the dramatists of remarkable degree; it is rather in the similarity of treatment and conception between the great play of Kyd and the masterpiece of his successor.

The motive of both plays is revenge, in each for a murder. In "Hamlet" the murder is committed before the opening of the play and is revealed by supernatural means. In "The Spanish Tragedy" the murder, which forms part of the action, is revealed by means of a mysterious letter. None will forget the burst of human grief that almost vanquishes Hamlet at the moment he hears of his beloved father's death. Though there is no attempt to portray Hieronimo fully as a human character of many sides, he experiences sufficient grief and sorrow to cause him to lose his mental balance temporarily. Yet he is soon in full possession of his wits and suggests to his wife that their cue is to dissemble.

I hope to show that there is reason to believe that Shakespeare had "The Spanish Tragedy" in mind while writing "Hamlet" and that, though he followed it as a model, he improved it at many points. It is noteworthy as an illustration that at the point in "Hamlet," corresponding with the above suggestion from

Hieronimo, Hamlet makes the speech which contains the phrase "To put an antic disposition on." Shakespeare, however, was, I think, too shrewd a judge of human nature to imagine that Hamlet who had just been startled out of sane behaviour by the terrible revelation of the ghost could in the same moment, like Hieronimo, be so self-possessed as to plan on the instant the ruse of assuming a future cloak of madness. The antic disposition is doubtless the "wild and whirling words" that his fellows could not understand, the general incoherent behaviour that has preceded the utterance of the line, and which Hamlet fears may occur again under a similar strain.

The author of the crime is revealed to Hamlet by the ghost — to Hieronimo by a letter. Both persons instantly suspect the trustworthiness of their information. Hamlet's doubt is due to his belief in a well-known Elizabethan superstition: namely, that the devil possessed the power to appear in the likeness of a dead person in order to tempt a living. This is a doubt shared likewise by Horatio and may well bid Hamlet pause till he have better proof. Hieronimo, however, suspects from no cause. The detail is unmotivated.

However, both men suspect, and both men resolve to test the truth of the information which they have received. Hamlet most carefully plans the "Mousetrap" which, though it turns out in an unsuspected way, convinces him of his uncle's guilt. Hieronimo asserts that he must take time for investigation, but in reality does nothing. He merely waits till a second more convincing letter comes to him quite by accident. Just why this letter should be written is not quite clear. It is intended by Kyd to convey information to Hieronimo, but it is intended by its writer, Pedringano, to convey an appeal for relief to Lorenzo. Yet the substance of the letter is that most calculated to harden Lorenzo's heart. Hieronimo, who was before so ready to doubt the revealing letter, accepts this as true in every respect and considers his doubts as completely set at rest. Both Hamlet and Hieronimo are now ready to act upon their original information — and both allow their revenge to be delayed till the end of the play.

How can we account for this delay? The answer to the form-

er case is evident. Hamlet has planned to sit quietly by till the "Mousetrap" is finished and then compare notes with Horatio on his uncle's behaviour. But he is himself affected by the scene beyond the limits of his endurance. By interrupting the proceedings too soon, Hamlet causes the court to disperse with the impression that Hamlet, not Claudius, has made an exhibition of himself. Though Hamlet is himself convinced of his uncle's guilt, he realizes that he has so bungled the affair that he will be unable to convince others of anything but his own inability to act with reason. In the reaction of despondency he allows himself to be drawn away from Denmark; but the moment his spirit returns he hastens back to accomplish his revenge.

Why Hieronimo delays is not quite so evident, yet a similar scene to the above appears in the corresponding portion of "The Spanish Tragedy." Immediately upon the completion of his self-conviction, Hieronimo resolves to appeal to the king. He has every reason to believe that his appeal will be successful. Yet, when he comes to the point, he is so wrought up by his emotion that he cannot say what he intended to say, and at last dashes off the stage hysterically mad. As in "Hamlet," the impression left upon the court is exactly opposite to that intended by Hieronimo. In the sequence, however, Hieronimo merely remains quiescent until the end of the play. He has no excuse for inaction. When Bel-Imperia upbraids him for his delay he requests her to wait and to expect great things, but he offers no defence.

These two scenes cannot be dismissed without a word concerning the wild behaviour that occasionally characterizes both Hamlet and Hieronimo. This is not the place to consider in detail the question of Hamlet's madness. He is certainly not insane in the sense that Lear is insane; nor is he believed insane by any of the shrewder intellects of the play — nor is Hieronimo. The key to their wild behaviour is the same. Both have exceptionally passionate natures. The revelation of the ghost, the "Mousetrap," and the burial of Ophelia act so powerfully upon Hamlet's nature that he temporarily loses self-control, control, however, which he immediately regains. The same is true of the character of Hieronimo.

There are a few other similarities between the two characters. Immediately after the failure of the "Mousetrap," during a conversation with the queen, Hamlet conjures up a vision of his father come to chide him for his long delay.

"Do you come," says Hamlet, "your tardy son to chide, That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by The important acting of your dread command?" Immediately after his failure to convey his appeal to the king, Hieronimo conjures up a vision of his son come to chide him for his delay. "And art thou come, Horatio," says Hieronimo, "from the depth To ask for justice in this upper earth, To tell thy father thou art unrevenged?"

Hamlet is spurred back to activity from the fit of despondency following the "Mousetrap" by the accidental sight of a company of Fortinbras's soldiers who remind him of his own unfinished debt of revenge. Similarly Hieronimo is spurred back to activity by the sight of a handkerchief dyed in his son's blood which he accidentally draws from his pocket.

When the end of the play is reached and the offenders are killed, both Hamlet and Hieronimo recognize the necessity of some public justification of their actions. Hieronimo delivers his own plea. For this, however, Hamlet's span of life is insufficient. Yet he dies, begging Horatio to do the office for him:

Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

With this close parallelism in mind is not one likely to hazard the inference that Shakespeare's play may bear less resemblance to the lost "Hamlet" than to "The Spanish Tragedy?" It is hard to believe that the first quarto, which in all its larger and broader qualities so closely resembles the scond, bears any close resemblance to the play by Kyd. This, if considered in the light of the above list of parallels, implies an almost inconceivable degree of self-imitation. On the other hand, one can easily imagine that Shakespeare, who borrowed not only plots, but other dramatic details that proved successful, would take for his model the most popular tragedy of his time, and adhere to it in

the main with the same fidelity illustrated, for instance, in "Romeo and Juliet." Yet he did in "Hamlet" what he had already done in "Romeo and Juliet." He transformed the unpoetic dross of the original into the poetic ore associated in our minds only with Shakespearian genius.

HENRY THEW STEPHENSON.

The University of Indiana, Bloomington.